

Yoga Darshan and Therapy in Indian Context

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Abstract:

Background: Yoga is a product of past glory of the Indian Society which is originated thousands years ago. Its principles and methods remained neglected for a long time due to varieties of reasons. But now a day's necessities has been felt to re-recognize the yoga philosophy as an emerging field of psychotherapy having both basic and applied nature of science. Its ultimate aims is to harmonizing human personality and transcending the self and consciousness.

Aims / Objectives: The aim of this chapter is to correlate the modern techniques used in current practices of psychotherapy with yogic practices in the treatment of mental disorders. Uses of yogic techniques in the psychological well-being of mankind has been discussed.

Method: This is a historical survey research based on past knowledge of yoga and its current clinical application in psychotherapy.

Result: Result revealed that many ancient concept of yoga as described in the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali has wider application with reference to their clinical implication in the current practices of psychotherapy. Yoga is necessary for every human beings in order to maintain a balance between oneself and our environment and to live a healthy life. Yoga is practiced since a very long times not only in India but also in abroad too.

Keywords: Yoga, psychotherapy, mental health, psychology, Darshan, Philosophy.

Introduction:

Yoga is a product of past glory of the Indian society which is originated thousands of years ago. Yoga has its reference in the Riga Veda and in Atharva Veda — which is the oldest and most ancient holy texts of Hindus written during the medieval period of Brahmanic traditions which was compiled prior to 2000 B.C.E. In both Vedas there is an elaborate discussion of the individual's psyche and well-being (Cornelissen, 2000).

Not only in the Vedic literature, but also in Indian philosophical systems too, yoga has its reference. It is one

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 10 February 2025

Received in revised form
22 February 2025

Accepted 28 February 2025

Citation: Santosh. A. K. & Kumari. C., (2025) "Yoga Darshan and Therapy in Indian Context", *Pen and Prosperity*, Vol. 2, Issue. 1, March 2025.

of the six astik or vedic school of Indian philosophy known as Yoga Darshan.

Credit goes to Maharshi Patanjali who made the most systematic presentation of Yoga in his Yoga- Sutras in 22 centuries ago. It was written in the Sanskrit Slokas — which is difficult to understand by the common men. It is religious and metaphysical in nature which is less accepted in west (Bhushan, 1996).

Place of Yoga in Psychology

Yoga has a close link with psychology. As we all know that psychology was defined as the study of soul or mind in the very beginning. Later on such definitions were spelt out in operational terms like conscious experiences, behavior and human adjustment. Many of the concepts of psychology which were brought to light in the 20th century were well-conceived and explained in the ancient literature of yoga in 2nd century B.C.

The Yoga techniques have important applications in the management of many psychological issues, psychosomatic disorders and social problems as well as in promoting and transcending the self. It offers theoretical constructs as well as practical techniques for the balanced functioning of body and mind, for promoting physical fitness, mental agility and spiritual verve. Different concepts of ancient yogic practices have been utilizing in the current practices of psychotherapy.

Yoga therapy uses many yogic asanas such as yoga postures, breathing exercise, meditation and guided imagery in order to improve mental, physical, and spiritual health and so on. Yoga therapy is well-established treatment modalities for depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders, schizophrenia, autism, substance abuse issues and many other physical and mental health issues.

Definition of Yoga

The word Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root “Yuj”, which means to unite. Yoga means union of body and mind, mind and soul, soul and supreme soul (Lakshmi, 1996).

Yoga has been defined by Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1980), as a “complete science of consciousness. It provides mastery over all stages of consciousness”.

According to the Gita, Yoga is that state, where there is nothing higher or worth realizing than it and the state free from all pain and misery is Yoga.

According to Yogananda Paramahansa (1995), Yoga defined in the Bhagawat Gita as “Yoga is that state, where there is nothing higher or worth realizing than it and the state free from all pain and misery”.

Patanjali defined yoga as “Chitta-Vrittis Nirodh”, that is, modifications of mind. (Mishra et al. 2003).

He mentioned the following five vrittis or cognitive modifications of mind to help us better understand the working of the mind. These vrittis are:

1) Pramana: Pramana is the proof or valid cognition. Patanjali says, the right knowledge can be gained from three sources:

- (i) Pratyaksha (Direct experiences): Knowledge acquiring through direct use of our five senses (eye, ear, nose, taste and touch) are valid and true.
- (ii) Anumana (Inferences): Knowledge gained by applying logic and reason are true.

(iii) Agamah (Trustworthy testimony): Trusting in the knowledge and experience of the experts are true.

2) Viparyaya: Viparyaya is the illusion or invalid cognition / wrong knowledge / misconception. It is the false knowledge arises on the descriptive appearance of that object. For example, we may mistake a rope for a snake in the dark.

Based on our own likes, dislikes, interest etc we will see the different things in a same object. A tree is not simply what we see with our five senses, rather than we see what is relevant to us which are conditioned by our own biases.

3) Vikalpa (Imagination / Object less verbal cognition): Vikalpa is the imagination or object less verbal cognition. It is an idea that we create in our mind about ourselves. If we create an idea about ourselves that we are wonderful, amazing, capable etc., then we live our life believing this about ourselves. On the vice-versa, if we tell ourselves that we are failure, useless, worthless and unsuccessful, then our mind believes this and our life will be a reflection of this.

So, this function of Vikalpa / imagination can heavily influence our thought process – causing happiness or suffering in our life. We can create an imagined world for ourselves based on our way of thinking.

4) Nidra (Deep sleep or absence of all distinct cognition): In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali says that “deep sleep is when the mind is overcome by heaviness and no other activities are present”. So, when the mind is not in the first three vrittis (Pramana, Viparyaya, and Vikalpa), then it was to sleep. In the deep sleep, the mind is not conscious at all and free from all worries, anxieties, and tension.

There is an ancient yogic meditation technique called, “Yoga-Nidra”, in which it is possible to experience deep sleep consciously, that can be achieved through regular, sustained and rigorous practices under the guidance of a Yoga- Guru.

5) Smriti: (Memory or recollection of past cognitions): Memory is the mental retention of a conscious experience. All conscious experience leaves an impression on the individual and is stored as memory. This conscious experience may be good or bad. If it is good, it will produce pleasures, if it is bad, it will create stir, make feel us angry, sad and agitated.

These vrittis when directed towards sources of affliction or pain are called Klishta Vrittis. It produces pain and misery. Patanjali suggested two ways to control the vrittis (Bhushan, 1994). They are:

- 1) **Abhyasa** – Practicing meditation and other yogic procedures.
- 2) **Vairagya** – Detachment from the world.

As per Patanjali there are five basic sources of distress. Such sources are called Pancha-Kleshas. These Pancha- Kleshas are:

- 1) **Avidya** – that is, ignorance or nescience.
- 2) **Asmita** – that is, egoism.
- 3) **Raga** – that is, attachment.
- 4) **Dwesha** – that is, hatred, and

5) **Abhinivesha** – that is, fear of death.

Patanjali has given an elaborate description of these kleshas and has underlined that Avidya (ignorance / nescience) is the root causes of all other distresses. Avidya does not mean absence of knowledge, rather it means looking for wrong actions and ideas which ultimately gives pain. (Bhushan, 1994).

Chakras (Psychic energy)

Yoga presents vivid and sound meditations procedures for the attainment of psychic consciousness or super consciousness mind through the awakening of Kundalini. The awakening of Kundalini takes place through gradual actions of the seven chakras (psychic energy) (Jung, 1996). They are:

- 1) **Muladhara Chakras:** Muladhara Chakra is situated at the base of the spine. The Kundalini awakening originates here. Many monks (Swami Satyananda Saraswati, 1984; Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati, 2010; Swami Paramhans Maheshwarananda, 2004) describe it as the subtle Red Bindu or spot, because when it is activated, it exudes a red aura. It is the linked with the earth element, the action of excretion and the sense of smell.
- 2) **Swadhisthana Chakras:** Swadhishtana Chakra is located two finger-widths above the Muladhara Chakra. That is, in front of the body just below the belly button. It is associated with the reproductive organs and the sense of taste.
- 3) **Manipura Chakra:** The Manipura chakra is located behind the navel point. It is related to the power of fire and digestion and the sense of sight and the act of movement. It is the epicenter of will-power or Icha-Shakti. By mediating on Manipura Chakra, one can achieve the capacity to save or destroy the world (Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati, 2010).
- 4) **Anahata Chakra:** It is situated at heart. Anahata is the seat of the subtle prana or jivatman. It is associated with love, compassion, touch, air and the action of the hands.
- 5) **Vishuddhi Chakkra:** It is situated in the throat. It is the purification center. It is associated with creativity and self-expression. When it is activated, the negative experiences are transferred into wisdom and learning. It is related to actions of speaking, and sense of hearing.
- 6) **Aagya Chakra:** Aagya Chakra is situated in the brain near Pineal and the Pituitary glands. It is considered the third eye of Clairvoyance and intellect. There were many instances in the ancient Indian system of education, where the Guru poured his knowledge in his Shishya (Disciple). This transfer of mind communication was possible through the activation of Aagya Chakra only.
- 7) **Sahasrara Chakra:** This chakra is located on the crown of the head. It is the center for more profound connection with us and more insightful relationship with a force of life that is greater than ourselves. This chakra represents self-actualization, where the individual is liberated from all Karmas and identifies the hidden energy center within.

These evolution of mind through yogic sadhana is a gradual process. It brings balance and harmony in the personality and makes life blissful.

Ashtanga Yoga

Patanjali presented the eight-fold path of yoga for the overall development of human personality. This is called “**Ashtanga Yoga**”, that is, steps of yoga (Mishra et al., 2003)

A brief description of each of ashtanga yoga is presented below:

1) **Yama:** Yama means restraints in behavior. These are five in number:

- i) **Ahinsa:** Ahinsa is non-violence. It is not to harm other living beings in deeds, thoughts, and language.
- ii) **Satya:** Satya is truthfulness. This means not to tell lie.
- iii) **Asteya:** Asteya means not stealing or misappropriating the things that belongs to others.
- iv) **Brahmacharya:** Brahmacharya means celibacy or purity of sexual life.
- v) **Aparigraha:** Aparigraha means not to possess beyond the actual needs.

2) **Niyama:** Niyama means observances in behaviors. These are also five in number:

- i) **Saucha:** Saucha means keeping purity of internal and external body.
- ii) **Santosh:** Santosh means contentment.
- iii) **Tapa:** Tapa means conditioning the body to endure difficulties like fasting etc.
- iv) **Svadyaya:** Svadyaya means to study spiritual scriptures to acquire correct knowledge of self and the supreme divinity.
- v) **Ishwara Pranidhana:** Ishwara Pranidhana means surrendering oneself to the Almighty God.

3) **Asana:** Asanas are special patterns of bodily postures that maintain balance between the mind and the body. By practicing various bodily postures, some of the dormant psycho- physical systems of the body are activated. Every asana should be performed effortlessly, and maintained for a considerable duration. Asanas may be classified as:

- i) **Meditative:** Meditative Asanas are the body positions or asana that can be performed in usually sitting position but also sometimes standing or reclining. It can be used to facilitate meditation. Siddhasana, padmasana, vajrasana, and sukhaana are usually considered as best meditative postures.
- ii) **Stretching:** In the stretching postures, we are straightening or extend one's body or a part of one's body to its full length, typically so as to tighten one's muscles. Tadasana, Uttanasana, Baddha Konasana, Bhujangasana, etc. are some of the classical example of stretching asanas.
- iii) **Relaxative:** By practicing relaxative asanas, we are able to relax the body and the nervous system. Savasana, Makrasana, Matsyasana, Sasangasana, Balasana, Gomukhasana etc. are some of the prominent name of relaxative asanas.

4) **Pranayam:** Pranayama is the regulation of breath. Here we are holding the breath for a considerable and sustainable duration. Pranayam influences our mental functioning by controlling the autonomic nervous system.

5) **Pratyahara:** Pratyahara is the withdrawal of mind from all senses. It is purely a psychological technique. By practicing this, determination of withdrawal of senses will come from outer and inner stimuli. Pratyahara is a very useful technique in the current practices of psychotherapy to break down

the learned and conditioned responses.

- 6) **Dharana:** Dharana means steadiness of mind, which comes after the state of mastery over the senses. In this stage, the practitioner keeps their mind empty but steady for longer and longer duration and continues to practice concentrating on any one point.
- 7) **Dhyana:** Dhyana is the meditation. It is the unity of the mind with some object.
- 8) **Samadhi:** When the awareness of oneness is carried to the extent of even forgetting this act of becoming one with the thing thought of, it is called the state of Samadhi.

Types of Yoga:

Yoga has different types such as Raj yoga, Jnana yoga / Gyan yoga, Bhakti yoga, Karma yoga, Mantra yoga and many more. A brief description is presented below:

- 1) **Raja Yoga:** Raja means “Royal” and meditation is the focal point of this branch of yoga. Raja Yoga focuses on both body and mind, but the emphasis is on mental and spiritual development. The main purpose of raja yoga is to unite the practitioner with the higher self. Practitioners of Raja Yoga regard themselves as “heroes of mind training.” (*Vivekananda, Swami, 1995*).
- 2) **Jnana yoga / Gyan yoga:** Jnana yoga is a path of knowledge or path of self-realization. It is one of the three classical paths for moksha (salvation, liberation) as described in Bhagavad Gita. The other two classical paths are Karma Yoga (path of action) and Bhakti Yoga (path of loving devotion to a personal God). The practitioner of this path of yoga, pursues knowledge with questions such as “Who am I”, what am I”.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Jnana Yoga is referred as “Buddhi Yoga” and its goal is self- realization. It is most difficult, slow, and confusing path for those who practice it. Because it deals with “formless reality”. Chapter 4 of the Bhagavad Gita is dedicated to Jnana Yoga while chapter 7 and 16 discuss its theological and axiological aspects. Intellectually oriented people tend to prefer Jnana yoga. (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 4, 7 and 16).

- 3) **Bhakti yoga:** Bhakti yoga describes the path of devotion. Its major aim is to seeing the divine in all of the creation. In the Bhakti yoga, the devotee loves devotion to a personal God as a path of spirituality. The personal God varies with the devotees. It may includes Shaiva – who worship the god Shiva, Vaishnava – who worship the god Vishnu and their various Avatars, and Shakta – who worship the goddess Shakti such as Durga, Kali, Lakshmi and Parvati. There are four types of devotees, as mentioned in the chapter – 7 of the Bhagavad Gita, who practices Bhakti yoga.
 - (i) Some practice it to get relief from the pain and suffering.
 - (ii) Some practice it due to curiosity and intellectual intrigue.
 - (iii) Some seeks rewards by performing bhakti, and
 - (iv) Some who love God perform bhakti due to pure love..

The highest spiritual level is forth – those who are performing bhakti because of their true love towards the god.

- 4) **Karma yoga:** Karma is the path of self-transcending action. A true karm yogi must do the right action

without considering its consequences and for them this right action is a form of prayer. In the karma yoga, the path of virtuous action (karma) is more important without expecting reward and consequences for doing the right things. This is called Nishkama Karma in the Bhagavad Gita.

- 5) **Mantra yoga:** In the Mantra Yoga, we are chanting the mantras of Vedas. Here, we are focusing on the sound, duration and number of repetitions of the mantras. Practitioner of Mantra yoga often uses mala (yoga beads) to keep count of the repetitions. Mantra is helpful to get closer to the divinity within and it creates positive vibrations. It is beneficial for both the one who chants the mantra and the one who listens. Chanting mantras calms the mind, bring focus and is great for controlling the breath. Mantra yoga can be practiced in three ways:
- (i) **Baikhari** – Mantra is chanted loudly. It is helpful to remove unwanted thoughts from the mind.
 - (ii) **Upanshu** – Here, the practitioner chanted the mantra in a relatively low voice that only the practitioner can hear.
 - (iii) **Manasic** – Mantra is chanted silently to one's self.
- 6) **Tantra Yoga:** Tantra yoga is the combination of asana, mantra, mudra and bandha (energy lock) and chakra (energy center), that can be used to build strength, clarity, and siddhi (bliss) in everyday life. The first systematic description of tantra script is found in Atharva Veda. Tantra yoga appeal to those yogis who enjoy ceremony and relate to the feminine principle of the cosmos, which yogis call shakti.
- 7) **Hath yoga:** In Sanskrit, Hatha means force. Hence, the hath yoga is a forceful yoga. Here, the practitioner uses forcefully the various yogic postures, or asanas, and breath control as a way to enhance vital energy. The practitioner of hath yoga are specialized in many physical purification techniques and a large number of postures that exercise the body in various ways.

Among the various paths of yogic practices, one may prefer any one according to their own choice and suitability. The central aim of all yogic practices is the same – to open pranic energy – channels and chakras and to aware of Surya in the form of Pingala Nadi, or Kundalini, or Gayatri, or Asanas, or Pranayam, or meditation.

Yoga can be practiced by anyone and not only by Yogis or Sanyasins. It can be practiced anywhere in home, office, or even trains and not only in temples or on mountain tops. It teaches self- discipline and self-regulation (Lakshmi, 1996).

Significance of ancient concept of yoga in the present practice of psychotherapy: Treating mental health problems:

According to the yogic theory, disease develops because of imbalance in the psychosomatic and pranic system. The yogic practices restore the balance and remove the toxins from the Nadis and the body system. The same practices help in building a defense against diseases and promote healthy life. Practicing yoga may reduce pain, stress, tension and anxiety. It may improve quality of life and reduce symptoms of a number of psychological disorders. Regular yoga practitioner was found to have lower level of cortisol- a stress hormone. Participating yoga was found to decrease self-report symptom of depression. Studies show that anxiety and depression are marked by low level of GABA neurotransmitter – an inhibitory neurotransmitter. Yoga may increase GABA level and reduce stress and anxiety.

Many scholars such as Vorkapic and Range, 2014; Miller, Fletcher and Kabat-Zinn, 1995; Kabat- Zinn, Massion, Kristeller, Peterson, Fletcher et al, 1992; Lee, Ahn, Choi, Yook et al, 2007;

Javnbakht, Hejazi Kenari and Ghasemi, 2009; Vempati and Telles, 2002 expressed their opinion that yoga has been successfully used as the intervention techniques for the treatment of mental disorders such as anxiety, stress, depression and panic attack. A good number of studies have established beneficial effects of yogic practices in managing anxiety (Sharma and Agnihotri, 1982), depression and other types of neurotic disorders (Naug, 1975; Nagarthana & Nagendra, 1980). They have been found equally useful in treating stress related psychosomatic disorders like diabetes (Divekar, 1982), tension headache (Sethi et al., 1981), hypertension and ischemic heart (Swami Karmananda Saraswati, 1982; Ornish, 1990) and drug addiction (Kaul, 1993). Studies have been conducted to examine the effects of yogic practices on neural functioning including the autonomic nervous system and brain waves (Ramamurthi, 1977; Varma, 1979).

Emphasizing on the present: Living in the present is an essential part of both yogic practices and psychotherapy. Both emphasizes on the present and accepting the events as the way they occur. Much emphasis was given to avoid the negative emotions without accepting them. Those who suffers from panic disorder develops maladaptive behavior as a way to prevent future attacks.

Meditation: After acceptance, the practices of yogic psychotherapeutic technique, the next step in the process of conflict removal is the meditation. Most of our problems are on account of excitement, and flickering and fluctuating nature of mind. Meditations and relaxation techniques are good to relax and quieting the mind (Bhogle and Jai Prakash, 1993; Datey, 1978; Singh, Shettiwar and Udupa 1978). Meditation enhances mental alertness, creative ability and stress management capacity of individual (Swami Muktananda Saraswati, 1982). The more one meditates and learns to relax, the more they allows for suppressed emotions and problems to arise. These manifestations of anxiety / negative emotions with a detached attitude are a very powerful tool of thought exertion in our lives (Jangid, Vyas, & Shukla, 1988). Psychotherapists can teach clients yoga skills particularly breathe holding and meditation that the client can use safely outside of the therapy session. It will improve psychological well-being.

Desensitization: Desensitization is a very effective technique utilized in the process of psychotherapy to extinction of conditioned reflexes (Wolpe, 1973). It involves three basic stages: training on physical relaxation, making hierarchy of anxiety provoking situations, and counter- conditioning of relaxation as a response to the stimulus. According to Barlow and Craske 2000, in vivo exposure is preceded by imaginary exposure, from the less to the most feared situations. This approach is very similar to the ancient yogic practices of Shavasana where one should be completely relaxed in his everyday life, which can be achieved through yogic practices. Then through the meditation, one should imagine himself in confront with the object of fear (a spider, for example) and the emotional reaction to the object (fear of spider). As the practices increases, the probability to respond towards the emotionally threatening object gradually decreasing and fear diminished gradually (Vorkapic, 2017). As view express by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, 1981 people are less predisposed to react emotionally to an object of fear when confronting it during deep relaxed states (Satyananda, 1981).

Self-suggestion: Today, during the practices of psychotherapy, the power of self-suggestion has been recognized. It has placebo effect and is very effective to produces heal or get sick by suggestion. People are continuously “self-suggesting” themselves in different adverse situations. People are trying to convince the self that the fear and the anxiety experienced are unjustified. During the ancient times, this technique was used in yogic practices and this technique worked on intellectual level, but gradually the auto-suggestion becomes deeper and stronger. Usually, this technique of self-suggestion is used after yoga session or any other method of relaxation (Vorkapic, 2016). It was believed that only after the relaxation, the mind becomes truly receptive to the suggestion. Relaxation response generated by yogic practices produces hypnagogic mental state, which is characterized by not awake, not rapid eye movement sleep, or deep sleep (Vorkapic, 2016). During this mental state, consciousness will be open fully to external and internal aspects, such as

self-suggestion (Lou, Kjaer, Friberg, Wildschiodtz, Holm, Nowak, 1999).

Fostering positive mental health: Theoretical construct of yoga has been used in the current practices of psychotherapy. Some of them are enumerated below:

Yuktahara-vihara: To maintain self- discipline in food and habit and to follow code of conduct.

Asanas: Physical training through bodily posture.

Pranayama: Automatic training through deep breathing exercise.

Ekagramana: To practice various stages of meditations.

Conclusion:

Yoga is practiced in India since very ancient times. It is useful to maintain physical health and equilibrium between the body, soul, and mind. Our physical health is prime important. We can't achieve our goals with poorer health and produces unhappiness. It is well-known saying that "Health is not everything, but without health everything is nothing" (Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, 1993). There are various postures / asanas described in yoga in order to keep the body healthy. Not only this, a well-balanced diet is also necessary for good health. Breathing, Pranayam and meditations are the some of the mental techniques to discipline the mind. Yoga helps in maintain balance between the body and mind. Yoga guarantees wellness as well as fitness. Yoga is a way to attain peace through physical, mental and spiritual well being. Peace and harmony are related to Yoga. (Swami Satyananda Saraswati, 1976).

We must spare some time from our busy schedule to practice different techniques of yoga. Yoga has tremendous effect on our body, mind and soul. Therefore, it is often recommended that Yoga to be included in our daily life.

Yoga can be practiced by anyone at anytime and at any places. We must include the yoga in our part of life in order to produce positive thinking, perseverance, discipline, right orientation, prayer as well as humble and kindness.

Hence since 21 June, 2015 onward, 21st June is celebrated every year as an International Yoga Day, all over the world, so that yoga is practices by all in order to maintain total health, mental agility and spiritual verve. It is crystal clear from the above discussion that the current practices of yoga therapy have been adopted a lot from the ancient concept of yoga philosophy. Yoga philosophy flourishes the current practices of yoga therapy and offer a lot to a psychotherapeutic paradigm in the Indian context.

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